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Citizen Malcolm X Blueprint for Black
Liberation: Coming of Age with Rod Bush on
Race, Class and Citizenship in the Bandung Era

The emergence of Black Power as a mass slogan signaled a fundamental turning point in the modern Afro-American liberation struggle, carrying it to the threshold of a new phase. It marked a basic shift in content and direction of the movement, from civil rights to national liberation, with a corresponding realignment of social forces.

—Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*

By 2000 Rod Bush and I began to share the podium, from the Brecht Forum to the Socialist Scholars Conference and the Left Forum. We met in 2000 to discuss the publication of our new books: Rod had just published *We Are Not What We Seem: Black Nationalism and Class Struggle in the American Century* (1999) and I had just released *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka and Black Power Politics* (1999). We found out that we shared a common history in the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) of the 1970s; however, we

had not met back then. In those days, Rod Bush was organizing in the West and I was organizing in the East.

We came of age in the Black Power Generation that was inspired by Malcolm X. By May 19, 1972, we had realized one of Malcolm's projects as we mounted the first African Liberation Day March of 100,000 in support of black rebellion against the Portuguese and white settler colonies of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau as well as Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Southwest Africa (now Namibia) and South Africa. In those politically focused days when our generation identified the African American urban uprisings with the anticolonial rebellions in the Third World, we spoke of Black Fire; however, by the end of the century, activist-intellectuals like Rod and I were not only working to keep those radical liberation embers alive but also to pass them on to the next generations.

At times, this work of searching for answers in Black Liberation can be lonely—especially in those areas defined in terms of ideological heresy (now we speak of intersectionality); but, it didn't take long to discover that Rod Bush was trustworthy, politically reliable, and not only a comrade but also *a brother*. And, Rod's distinctive smile was the symbol of an important yet neglected aspect of the Black Revolt and its organizing tradition: political and intellectual *generosity*. While others were excluding the voices of Black Nationalism in the American radical tradition, Rod made room for all the important voices in the Black Revolt, including the important Harlem Nationalists like Elombe Brath. Above all, Rod's research on race and class emboldened my thinking about political economy and global dynamics.

Rod helped me understand where anti-racism and Black Nationalism fit into the important work with Immanuel Wallerstein linking white domination to the world-system. The global framework established by Rod Bush has clarified my research agenda: How did racism and whiteness develop into basic organizing principles in the making of the modern world? And, based on that research, what must be the content of programs for Black Liberation and for the abolition of racial tyranny?

Rod Bush and I are linked to the sons and daughters of Malcolm X

in the Black Power Generation; we carry Malcolm's legacy in the search for answers that will end the world of racial oppression. Unfortunately, when most people consider Malcolm's legacy of Black Liberation by any means necessary, they are not thinking of the intellectual dimensions of that charge. Critical to the protracted struggle for freedom is that we must *think* our way out of racial oppression.

In his last year, Malcolm X was attempting to fashion a political and ideological mixture suitable for Black liberation in the U.S. Stressing the need for African Americans to develop their own revolutionary ideology and organization, Malcolm X urged them to search for philosophical, economic and political approaches rooted in the African Personality. If Black people wanted to be free, they could *not* be guided by the thinking of their former slave masters: the logic of the oppressor is different from the logic of the oppressed.

For Malcolm, the creativity and improvisation of Black music was a clear paradigm for revolutionaries.¹ In line with that, in the 1960s most of the leading Black Power organizations braved charges of ideological heresy as they developed political philosophies which were amalgams of various proportions of Scientific Socialism and Black Nationalism. African Americans will have to continue to draw upon the best knowledge in the world in order to solve their immense problems of self-emancipation, political liberation and socio-economic development. Those lessons come in different ideological and political packages; and Black leadership must use good judgment in choosing the insight and information that is necessary to navigate the road to freedom.

Thus, that leadership must have the richest possible menu of choices in order to change the world with an eye toward self-emancipation. If you study Rod Bush's work, then you see his examination of the important yet neglected ideological figures in the Harlem community of Black Nationalists. The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o emphasizes the dual importance of remembering in terms

1. There is a line of liberation thinking about the music that links Malcolm X to Richard Wright on that issue, viz. Richard Wright's "Blueprints for Negro Literature."

of memory and remembering in terms of reconstruction, making the tortured body of blackness whole again. Rod Bush encouraged us to remember the Black radical tradition in Harlem. Let's turn to this political moment.

Since African Americans have always suffered from a lethal combination of racism and capitalism, of racial oppression and class exploitation, on most occasions Black America requires an ideological and political arsenal which includes elements of both Black Nationalism and Marxism; the emphasis of Black leadership must change according to the nature of the period. During eras of intense group conflict in American society, African Americans will have to draw upon a profound understanding of the dynamics of nationalism, national consciousness, and nationality formation. Because of the dynamics of group competition and the ethos arising from such clashes and hostility, probably those would be periods during which progressive allies are scarce. No matter what the situation, African Americans must survive those periods.

But, during times of powerful capitalist antagonism in the U.S., Black America would be wise to draw upon a rich knowledge of Marxism, political economy, class consciousness, and class formation. During those junctures, there should be a much greater potential for progressive allies because of the dynamics of business accumulation, increasing unemployment, and public policy shifting the weight of economic crisis onto the backs of broad sections of the American people; that may make possible a populist spirit emanating from such conflicts. However, due to the historic character and complexity of Black America, at no time can the emphasis of serious leadership be purely Marxist or Nationalist without doing serious damage to the Black national community. In other words, sectarianism and ideological purity are the enemies of Black liberation and the fight for equality.

As we developed the agenda for the conversations at the Socialist Scholars Conferences and the Left Forums, Rod Bush was always fighting for the inclusion of the voices of Black Liberation on the Left. There is a bad habit of thinking that liquidates Black self-determination on the Left. Thus, Rod worked tirelessly and effectively

to keep that door open, welcoming each successive generation into the Left. I remember when I would get too frustrated with some of the comrades who habitually closed the door to those young militant Black voices, it was Rod who encouraged me to continue the struggle with the White Left. In other words, Rod always saw the big picture.

The roots of racial oppression run deep into the origins of the American Empire. African captives in the Atlantic Slave trade were trapped, tortured and ground down to their common humanity by the clash between the designs of several Empires from Africa to the New World. In West Africa, despite some notable exceptions, one set of military, royal and imperial priorities made it logical to sell rival African nationalities to slave traders of the western empires; those captives developed into the Black Workers in bondage employed to build the foundations of the colonial empires in the Americas.

With the rise of the Atlantic Slave Trade and that global economy, race and racism developed into important organizing principles in the making of the modern world; and that epic propelled not only empires and colonies but also concepts of commerce, law, property, capital and labor in turn shaping cities, architecture, housing, education, industry and citizenship as well as the making of the polity, the police and public policy. In other words, racism is deeply embedded in the modern world; and civil rights, voting rights and affirmative action legislation were never designed to attack the roots of that destructive white racism.

Grappling with the problems of race, class and citizenship, Malcolm X embarked on an important ideological project to fuse together the insights of Black Nationalism with the lessons of radical political economy for the sake of Black Liberation in the Bandung Age when rebels in Black America, Latin America, Asia, and Africa seized the time. Malcolm X joined forces with African revolutionaries like Abdul Rahman Mohammed Babu of Zanzibar; and he initiated young artists and writers like Sonia Sanchez, Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka. And, he also secretly allied himself with Martin Luther King, Jr., to take the battle for Human Rights for Black America into the United Nations.

However, ideologues in both camps of Black Nationalism and of Marxism rejected the fusion of their insights and lessons into a new Black political culture, charging *not only heresy but also treachery!* Nonetheless, despite those passionate protests of heresy, that fusion—rekindled by Malcolm X, Amiri Baraka and the Black Arts Movement—fueled the phenomenal rise of the Black Power Generation and the Black Cultural Revolution. And, one mission of the research agenda for Black Power Studies is to trace those complex, rich and diverse origins. We discovered that far too many Black radicals like Gloria Richardson, Robert F. Williams, Mae Mallory, Elombe Brath, Flo Kennedy, Assata Shakur, Vicki Garvin, Abbey Lincoln, and so forth, are lost in the well-established purist frameworks because they developed ideas and programs at the Grassroots that addressed racial oppression in the funky streets of the USA. High on that agenda is the interrogation of Malcolm X and his radicalization.

I had high hopes that Manning Marable's project to recover the radicalization of Malcolm X would help clarify not only the roots of that fusion of Black Nationalism and Marxism into the Black Radical Tradition but also help reveal Malcolm X's blueprints for Black Liberation. Unfortunately, however, Manning Marable did not share those concerns as his first priority. By contrast, Rod Bush made that agenda his first priority. And, Rod Bush and I fought to create intellectual space for that uncensored liberation agenda.

The part of Malcolm X that Manning Marable *chose not to share* in his last book is a history that Manning, Rod and I discussed on many occasions: the legacy of the communist theory of the *African American National Question* that, in Malcolm's life, linked Black Nationalism, Grassroots Garveyism, and Revolutionary Marxism.

Let me share some of those conversations with Rod in this chapter.

During the 1980s I was tutored by Old Left veterans Vicki Garvin and Harry Haywood who worked with Malcolm X.² And, they had much to say about Vicki Garvin's attempts to recruit the young Malcolm X into the Harlem Left; Redd Foxx's biographer, Michael Seth Starr,

2. See Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik* and Harry Haywood, *Negro Liberation*.

adds to that information, reporting that Redd Foxx and Malcolm X studied communism and joined the party a few times during the Great Depression.³

In terms of Malcolm X, Harry Haywood revealed his correspondence from the Mexico City exiled community (alongside Elizabeth Catlett and others) with Cyril Briggs in Los Angeles. (Perhaps, Briggs met Malcolm X during the 1962 crisis when the L.A. police killed and maimed Muslims; and Malcolm's differences with Elijah Muhammad came to a head.) In that correspondence between Briggs and Haywood they discussed the rise of Malcolm X in the Nation of Islam as the *confirmation* of their persecuted theory about the revolutionary potential of Black Liberation and an African American oppressed nation within the heart of the American Empire.

Furthermore, alongside the diplomatic breakthroughs that Vicki Garvin, Maya Angelou and Malcolm X made in Ghana in 1964, Vicki also explained that she and Malcolm X shared a passion for the study of comparative revolution.⁴ Vicki Garvin spoke last to Malcolm X in Cairo at the OAU summit just before she went to join Robert and Mabel Williams in Mao's China at the height of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Malcolm X advised her to go to China and learn as much as she could, but he insisted she not forget to come back to Black America to teach those lessons to the Black Power Generation. Thus, when Vicki Garvin tutored us, we were the beneficiaries of that partnership between Vicki Garvin, Malcolm X, and Maya Angelou.

In his search for the kind of answers that would make Black Liberation powerful enough to overthrow white racial oppression, Malcolm X sought out African revolutionaries, including Abdul Rahman Mohammed Babu of the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964. Let's connect the dots here. The Zanzibar Revolution was unfolding in 1964 just as the ANC embraced guerrilla warfare over nonviolence and as

3. Michael Seth Starr, *Black and Blue: The Redd Foxx Story* (Milwaukee, 2011), 23, 20-24

4. In fact, I was introduced to that subject of comparative revolution as a teenager by listening to Malcolm X's speeches.

Malcolm X was breaking with the Nation of Islam for encouraging a parallel debate.⁵ And, Malcolm X was working on strategies that would outflank Uncle Sam's strategy of racial encirclement.

Thus, Malcolm X worked to refine the international component of his blueprint for Black Liberation. After Vicki Garvin and Maya Angelou arranged a meeting between Malcolm X and the Chinese Ambassador Huang Hua in Nkrumah's Ghana, Malcolm X met with Babu on at least four occasions in his last year. Given this line of development, students must wonder whether the high level meetings with Huang Hua and Vicki Garvin led to Malcolm's introduction to Babu. On the one hand, it is well-established that Babu was singular as the ideological and political link between Mao's Chinese Revolution and the burgeoning African Revolution in the 1960s. Indeed, Babu is reportedly the first African revolutionary to journey to China in the 1950s to meet with Mao Zedong, Zhou En-Lai and the other veterans of the Long March and the Yenan period. Ambassador Huang Hua was not only a veteran of the Long March but also a member of the Chinese delegation at the historic Bandung Conference with China's Prime Minister Zhou En-Lai. On the other hand, Vicki Garvin and Maya Angelou had been cultivating their contacts with African liberation leaders in Ghana's capital of Accra. At any rate, Babu played a distinct role in mentoring that radical cohort. He had even shepherded Patrice Lumumba into the Ghana summit where he was introduced to the leading Pan-African radicals: Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and Frantz Fanon.

Furthermore, Vicki Garvin was very close to Chinese Ambassador Huang Hua; Du Bois arranged for Vicki to work for Huang Hua as an English tutor to his children.⁶ And, soon after that meeting with Malcolm and Huang Hua, Vicki Garvin left Ghana for Mao's China where she joined Robert Williams and Mabel Williams in the middle

5. Nelson Mandela argued for guerrilla warfare against the nonviolent stance of Chief Albert Lutuli.

6. She told me that Du Bois arranged the position and her employment in China.

of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.⁷ In fact, she met Malcolm X at the Cairo summit of the OAU on her way to China and invited him to join her on the adventure. They were both students of the Chinese Revolution and that was their chance to see things first hand. But, Malcolm explained to Vicki that he wasn't going to make it; his time was short. Nonetheless, he beseeched her to go to China and then come back to teach the next generation in Black America.⁸

In either case, Malcolm X and Babu met on at least four occasions between 1964 and 1965; and given Malcolm X's sense that his time was limited, we should not underestimate his investment of that critical time. First, we know they met in 1964 in Cairo at the Second Summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Second, we know they met later in 1964 in Dar Es Salaam, then the capital of Tanzania, where Malcolm X stayed for about two weeks according to my colleague Matilda Zimmermann who taught at Sarah Lawrence College. Fresh out of college, Zimmermann is pictured in a photo with Malcolm X in *Malcolm X Talks to Young People*. Third, Malcolm X and Babu met finally in New York City where they conferred on the Bandung Strategy with Che Guevara and Amiri Baraka during the United Nations sessions from late 1964 into January 1965.

The basics of the blueprint for Black Liberation that Malcolm X may be captured in these several aspects: first, Malcolm X was working on Black Revolution in the Bandung Era in an alliance with the militants and radicals in liberations movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Second, that blueprint included a strategic alliance with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to bring the issue of African American human rights to the floor of the United Nations while Ghana's diplomat Alex Quaison-Sackey was the president of the UN General Assembly.⁹ Third, the strategy was to take advantage of the

7. Did Vicki Garvin or Huang Hua make the introduction? That question should enrich our research agenda.

8. Video talk by Vicki Garvin; conversations between Vicki Garvin and Komozi Woodard in the 1980s.

9. See Alex Quaison-Sackey, *Africa Unbound: Reflections of An African Statesman*; and Karl Evanzz, *The Judas Factor: The Plot to Kill Malcolm X*, 268, 269; on youth

conflict between the West and the East to free up some space for the Black Revolution. Fourth, the blueprint also involved sharing lessons with African revolutionaries during the moment when the ANC, led by Nelson Mandela, had decided to pick up the gun in guerrilla warfare against the Apartheid regime in South Africa. During that same period a number of the other African liberation groups were abandoning legal strategies and preparing for wars of liberation.¹⁰ And fifth, that stratagem also involved nurturing young artists like Maya Angelou, Sonia Sanchez, Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka in the Black Cultural Revolution that flowered into the Black Arts Movement.

As far as Karl Evanzz is concerned from his research in the government archives, the success of the alliance between Malcolm X, Dr. King and those Bandung allies in bringing the human rights issue to the floor of the United Nations shaped the urgency in the assassination of Malcolm X in February 1965. Malcolm X had not only attracted King to this gambit but he was also reaching out to Fannie Lou Hamer, Gloria Richardson, and SNCC to pull them into that strategy. You may recall that Harry Belafonte arranged for SNCC to take a tour of Africa in 1965 soon after Malcolm X's strategic journey: Fannie Lou Hamer, John Lewis, and so forth.

In *To Kill a Black Man*, Louis Lomax—like Karl Evanzz—concluded that the American Empire feared the success of Malcolm X and Martin Luther in pulling off that international human rights gambit; and that was a factor in their assassinations. Although they drew on two different sets of evidence, they reached the same conclusion. If Evanzz drew on the archives, then journalist Lomax drew upon his interviews with the principals.

By the end, both Malcolm X and King were working on a framework that saw race, class and human rights injustices together in the basic design of racial oppression in the American Empire. With Malcolm X dead, despite ugly warnings from Washington, Dr. King courageously stepped into the vacuum left by Malcolm X, alongside

in RAM, 83.

10. Viz, Richard Gibson, *African Liberation Movements*; Amilcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea*.

Stokely Carmichael and SNCC. And, in the Poor People's March, King showed the mobilizing potential of an interracial alliance of the nation's poor: Blacks, Chicanos, Native Americans, alongside the National Welfare Rights Organization as well as the impoverished whites that were left out of the bounty of the New Deal. About ten days before his assassination, King reaffirmed Malcolm's message to Amiri Baraka about the importance of that broad united front in any serious blueprint for Black Liberation.

Once Baraka rose in the leadership in the Congress of African People, the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC), and the National Black Assembly, he drafted a Bandung West summit blueprint for 1974 that would have created a common vehicle to fight racism in the American Empire, joining La Raza Unita, AIM (American Indian Movement) and the Young Lords together with the National Black Political Assembly and the African Liberation Support Committee. And, it was precisely at that political moment when agent provocateurs further exaggerated the vulnerable and volatile differences between Black Nationalism and Marxism.¹¹

Thus, the blueprints for Black Liberation developed from a Bandung Strategy in the hands of Malcolm X into a Bandung West Strategy in the hands of the Black Power Generation. Rod Bush and I did some of the spade work in the making of the Black Power Generation.

And, at times that spade work is lonely. I have been connecting the dots in that critical period in the Black Radical Tradition; and in that lonely project, Rod Bush helped sustain me with his example, his support and his intellectual interest. Although Rod's students have some big shoes to fill, Rod and I were brought up in the tradition where the most important work is "our students." And, Rod Bush fostered the growth of a new generation of young lions that is hard at work on the black liberation project.

11. One general reference is Earl Anthony, *Spitting in the Wind*.

Abstract

This essay authored by Komozi Woodard, titled “Citizen Malcolm X Blueprint for Black Liberation: Coming of Age with Rod Bush on Race, Class and Citizenship in the Bandung Era,” is a chapter in the anthology *Rod Bush: Lessons from a Radical Black Scholar on Liberation, Love, and Justice*, edited by Melanie E. L. Bush, and co-edited by Rose M. Brewer, Daniel Douglas, Loretta Chin, and Robert Newby (2019). In this chapter, Woodard discusses Rod Bush’s efforts, both intellectually and in the movement, to recognize the Black Radical tradition within the broad movement for liberation of all humankind. In his view, Bush worked tirelessly and effectively to insist upon the big picture, all the while recognizing the revolutionary role of African descended people in a world-system defined by white supremacy.

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Komozi Woodard is a professor of history at Sarah Lawrence College. He is the author of *A Nation Within a Nation*; a co-editor, with Sylviane A. Diouf, of *Black Power 50* (The New Press); and the editor of *The Black Power Movement, Part I; Freedom North; Groundwork*; and *Want to Start a Revolution?* Komozi Woodard holds a BA from Dickinson College and an MA, and Ph.D. from University of Pennsylvania. His special interests are in African American history, politics, and culture, emphasizing the Black Freedom Movement, women in the Black Revolt, US urban and ethnic history, public policy and persistent poverty, oral history, and the experience of anticolonial movements. He is the author of *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka and Black Power Politics* and numerous reviews, chapters, and essays in journals, anthologies, and encyclopedia. He has edited *The Black Power Movement, Part I: Amiri Baraka, From Black Arts to Black Radicalism; Freedom North; Groundwork; Want to Start a Revolution?* and *Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*. He has been a reviewer for American Council of Learned Societies; adviser to the Algebra Project and the PBS documentaries, *Eyes on the Prize II* and *America’s War on Poverty*. He is a member of board of directors, Urban History Association.

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